

Preface

Two-thousand thirteen marked the 20th anniversary of the Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA). It was a time to celebrate and to reflect on the achievements over the past two decades and a time to look forward and to consider the future. It was also an opportunity to thank all of those who laid the foundations of the NOHA educational institution and who facilitated its growth and maturity.

The idea of NOHA, or more precisely, of the potential for higher education institutions to play their part in enhancing professionalism in the delivery of humanitarian aid through education came from five European universities in the early 1990s: Aix-Marseille Université, University of Bochum, University of Deusto, Université Catholique du Louvain and Oxford University, four of whom are currently partners of NOHA. They set on board the pioneering task of finding space for universities among the then limited humanitarian stakeholder mix.

The approach that they employed was so innovative that some might say it was verging on the insane: universities networking across Europe, in a pre-Ryanair and pre-Internet era, delivering a multidisciplinary Masters that would be managed and administered by academics from a range of related disciplines. This meant getting lawyers, medics, sociologists, logisticians, anthropologists, managers and political scientists to discuss, coordinate and agree on a subject with a very limited track record. On reflection, while President Obama might have popularised the slogan “Yes, we can!”, its underlying philosophy far outdates its popular usage.

From its very onset, NOHA was designed to be a marathon rather than a 100-m sprint. Central to its growth and evolution was a core set of principles that places NOHA in a space equally shared by universities and humanitarian organisations; these are values such as academic rigour, shared learning, respect for peer institutions and humility together with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity. The strength of NOHA has thus been the ability of its partner institutions to respect the diversity of its members, while at the same time coming together as a cohesive and coherent network, with common principles and values. It has been its ability to keep pace with the changes and complexities in

and of the sector, guided by a strong vision on how education can effectively contribute to relieve the suffering of populations affected by crises and disasters.

From its inception in 1993 to-date, the number of member universities has more than doubled and links with universities outside Europe, as well as with a broad range of humanitarian stakeholders in and outside Europe, have been established and consolidated. The relationships established with the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO) and the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) have been particularly rich. The origins of NOHA and DG ECHO date back to the same period, and the support provided over these many years by DG ECHO rests on a common vision of how education can contribute to the sector. The political pressure from within the DG and from sister DGs was also a struggle, as a few visionaries succeeded in securing the space and resources to support humanitarian education. Far beyond the funding that has been provided by DG ECHO over the years, it was this vision, the exchanges in terms of shared learning and the mutual respect that have been invaluable. While allowing NOHA to maintain its independence, the relationship with DG ECHO has provided tremendous opportunities to engage when mutually beneficial and further the thinking and practice of humanitarian action. The same can be said for the Red Cross, NGOs and other stakeholders with whom NOHA has grown and whose representatives have been faithful, thought-provoking and committed contributors over the past 20 years to the provision of humanitarian education within the NOHA framework.

NOHA is very much different in 2014 than it was in 1993, but so too is the humanitarian context. Unfortunately, humanitarians have not put themselves out of a job and all indicators would suggest an increase in demand for humanitarian professionals in the future, brought about by a range of factors, including new and on-going conflicts, urbanisation and climate change to mention a few. The humanitarian space is also very different for many reasons, not least the proliferation of actors. In 1993, the United Nations had limited direct involvement in humanitarian crises and had a relatively limited role in comparison with its mandate in 2014. The number and range of NGOs have increased exponentially, while the introduction of relatively new actors including the media, the military, the private sector and higher education has contributed to a crowding of this humanitarian space. It is estimated that the global humanitarian budget in 2014 is approximately 150 times greater than what it was in 1990, yet the deficit between the forecasted humanitarian need and supply is growing.

The NOHA educational and research product base has expanded in scope and scale in response to the increased demand over these 20 years. NOHA's archetypal Masters programme in International humanitarian action remains its flagship educational programme. However, NOHA has added a wide range of educational projects at all levels, from undergraduate to PhD, to its portfolio. The NOHA alumni, the majority of whom stem from the pool of 3,000 humanitarian professionals who successfully graduated from the Masters programme, now hold places in the vast majority of humanitarian organisations including the NOHA organisation itself and its partner universities. In addition, NOHA has a rich

network of non-European universities, including Colombia University in New York, the University of Javeriana in Bogota, the University of Western Cape in Cape Town, Monash University in Melbourne, University of Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut and the University of Bangalore in Bangalore. They are ready to take on the challenge to grow the NOHA philosophy beyond Europe.

In contemplating and imagining what NOHA is going to be like in the future, the imperative of academic excellence and rigour and of alleviating suffering remains intact. There is a need for the NOHA leaders of today to be as visionary—some might say as insane—as their founding members, to develop new and creative approaches and strategies to bridge the growing gap between humanitarian need and supply. Education has a key role to play. As Nelson Mandela clearly articulated, “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world”.

There have been several requests in recent years from Erasmus Mundus partner institutions to formalise the relationship to allow for them to become full members of the Network. These requests have always received serious consideration. However, it is generally agreed that representation from one university from any global region could never provide the required equity in the partnership arrangement, and policy and power would inevitably be skewed in Western/European favour. With this in mind, the concept of global regional NOHA networks was framed, that is, that existing NOHA Mundus Universities would consider establishing a NOHA Network in their own global regions and that the NOHA philosophy could be shared with these regions, beyond Europe. The potential of such a network would have great value for both, the global North and South, and contribute tremendously to the global humanitarian action project.

In Europe, humanitarian education is a work in progress. Europeans are becoming immune to statistics concerning global suffering being thrown at them. NOHA universities and universities in general need to look at innovative ways to reach out to students, not just those who have chosen humanitarian action as a field of study—or careers in humanitarian action—but to all higher education students and beyond to enhance the European humanitarian value system. Would it be over-ambitious to imagine that a significant percentage, maybe 10 or 15 %, of every third level students in Europe had completed an elective module in humanitarian action as part of his or her third level education?

NOHA is committed to building on the foundations established over the past generation. During the 20th anniversary celebrations, we called on our respective universities to share this commitment. The NOHA Directors, the NOHA Faculty and the NOHA Coordinators are the nucleus of the NOHA programme in each partner institution. It is their determination and commitment that has made NOHA what it is today and which gives the impetus to push for generation two. NOHA now has a team of alumni whose dedication to progress and evolve the NOHA philosophy can be described as admirable. The ingredients for further success are in place, the need is there, now we need to move from the “yes, we can!” philosophy of generation one to a “yes, we will!” philosophy of generation two.

This first edition of the NOHA “The Humanitarian Challenge – 20 Years European Network on Humanitarian Action” is a symbol of the 20 years of NOHA and a reflection of what NOHA is today. It provides a series of articles addressing contemporary humanitarian issues written by members of the NOHA family and friends, as a substantive contribution to the humanitarian sector. It reflects the diversity in the disciplines, schools of thought, cultures and backgrounds that make up the NOHA corpus and that have forged, and continue to forge, the NOHA identity and, concomitantly, education and research in humanitarian action.

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